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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to analyze the cognitive and affective effects of hard sell and soft sell career education programs. (The infusion of career education into the traditional content areas is termed as soft sell while the hard sell approach establishes career education as a separate, formal content area.) Hard sell and soft sell approaches were analyzed with hearing-impaired students in twenty-three classes using two programs designed and developed for hearing-impaired secondary students: (1) the Career Planning System, which uses the hard sell approach, and (2) the Career Education Project, which follows the soft sell approach. Student cognitive gains were measured on pre- and posttests designed for each program. A teacher attitude questionnaire was completed by teachers using each of the two programs. While pre- and posttest results across programs show a slight increase in the mean posttest scores, neither program tested resulted in an educationally significant student gain in career knowledge or in the traditional content area. The teacher attitude questionnaire revealed that teachers in the survey preferred teaching hard sell programs and believed that students benefit more from those programs. (LRA)

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CAREER EDUCATION:

HARD SELL OR SOFT SELL?

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Career Education: Hard Sell or Soft Sell?

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Theoretical Framework

Career Education has been a highly visible force in American education for the past 15 years. Because of the rapidity of its growth, the conversion of career education from a set of conceptual elements to a viable set of instructional procedures is incomplete. Questions and issues regarding the administration, organization, implementation, and evaluation of career education programs are as yet unanswered. One major concern is the approach used to implement career education. Opinion on implementation techniques varies and educators do not support one single theory.

Many educators suggest that the skills, knowledge and attitudes students receive as a result of the career education effort be "infused," threaded," or "woven" into the context of existing courses in the curriculum (Hoyt, 1976; Marland, 1971). The infusion of career education into the traditional content areas is termed in this paper the "soft sell."

On the other hand, the vast amount of information a student needs to make a career decision presents a perplexing problem. Blum (1974) seemed to suggest that a different approach, a "hard sell" approach, was needed when he advocated a career education system that would provide an overview of the world of work and a common language about the world of work. The hard sell approach establishes career education as a separate, formal content area.

No studies have been conducted that deal specifically with the effects of the hard and soft sell approaches to career education. No evidence has been collected regarding student cognitive gains in hard and soft sell programs or student and teacher attitudes towards these programs. The purpose of this study was to analyze the cognitive and affective effects of hard sell and soft sell career education programs.

Method

The effects of the hard sell and soft sell approaches to career education were analyzed using two programs: the Career Planning System (CPS), and the Career Education Project (CEP). Both programs were designed and developed for hearing impaired secondary students.

The CPS consists of three components. All three components follow a hard sell approach to career education. The CEP consists of 14 units. Two CEP units follow a hard sell approach to career education; 12 units follow a soft sell approach.

The programs were tested with hearing impaired high school students in 23 classes. Student cognitive gains were measured on pre- and posttests designed specifically for each program. A Teacher Attitude Questionnaire was completed by teachers using each of the two programs.

Materials

Career Planning System (CPS)

The Career Planning System (CPS) is a set of hard sell career education materials. The CPS has three major components. Only the first component, Career Awareness, was tested in this investigation.

Career Awareness focuses on why people work, the vocabulary of work, how people plan for a career, and why career planning is important. Instruction is geared for students who have had little or no previous exposure to the topics. The concepts are taught through instructional games, interviews, role-plays, and class discussions. Students have a workbook for practice and reinforcement of basic concepts and vocabulary. Other materials include a Teacher's Guide, transparencies, instructional "comic books," and definition cards for new vocabulary. The component requires nine weeks of instruction.

Career Education Project (CEP)

The CEP provides teachers with examples of soft sell and hard sell career education materials. This series consists of 14 instructional packages. Twelve packages are separate units of instruction which infuse career education concepts and information into traditional content areas. Information about jobs related to each content area is provided in each soft self package. Two packages are hard sell units. These units are designed for use in separate formal career education classes. Instructional time requirements vary from three to nine weeks with each package.

Data Source

The CPS was pilot tested with 26 hearing impaired high school students. All 26 students had correctly answered less than 50% of the items on the program pretest. Each student was randomly assigned to one of four classes.

Eleven of the 14 units in the CEP were pilot tested with students in an appropriate content area. The hard sell units were pilot tested with students in a work study program. Seventy-five students participated in the pilot test of these 11 units.

Design

Four classes of students tested the CPS materials. All classes met once a week for two hours. The classes met for nine weeks.

The CEP units were tested within established classes. Instructional time varied from three to nine weeks. Classes met from one to five periods per week.

A layout of each pilot test examined in this investigation is given in Figure 1.

	PRETEST	INSTRUCTIONAL VARIABLES				INSTRUCTION	POSTTESTS
		No. of Students	No. of Teachers	No. of Classes	Average No. of Class Meetings		
CPS	paper-and-pencil (K = 24)	26	4	4	18	Complete 4 lessons; including class discussions, role-plays, etc. and workbook pages. Respond to lesson quizzes at completion of each lesson.	paper-and-pencil lesson quizzes (K = 22)

	PACKAGE	PRETEST[a]	INSTRUCTIONAL VARIABLES				INSTRUCTION	POSTTEST[a]
			No. of Students[b]	No. of Teachers	No. of Classes	Average No. of Class Meetings		
CEP	Loans and Credits	K = 29	15	3	2	43	Complete package according to instructions in Teacher's Guide, conduct evaluation activities at the end of the lesson, supplement with additional materials as necessary.	K = 29
	Using Natural Resources	K = 47	8	1	2	22		K = 47
	Foods and You	K = 26	3	1	1	40		K = 26
	Exploring Grooming and Occupations	K = 34	2	1	1	22		K = 34
	Introduction to Play Production	K = 40	2	2	1	45		K = 40
	Learning About Occupations	K = 37	2	1	1	31		K = 37
	Length and Area	K = 28	7	1	2	20		K = 28
	Getting a Job	K = 37	22	3	4	45		K = 37
	Technology Today	K = 42	7	1	1	54		K = 42
	Self-Understanding	K = 35	4	1	1	16		K = 35
	Social Interaction	K = 39	3	1	1	18		K = 39

FIGURE 1: Layout of the Experiment (CPS and CEP)

[a] all tests were paper-and-pencil

[b] total number of students completing both the pre- and posttest

Cognitive Assessment

Each program was tested with criterion-referenced pre- and posttests constructed specifically for each program and designed to measure the objectives relevant to each program. Students were given as much time as needed to complete the pre- and posttests. Test items were scored dichotomously (1 = pass, 0 = fail). No partial credit was given.

The pretest for the CPS component is a 24-item pencil-and-paper test. The posttest for this component consists of lesson quizzes for each lesson in the component. These quizzes were paper-and- pencil criterion tests. There are 22 items on the four lesson quizzes examined in this investigation.

The number of items on the pre- and posttests in the CEP varied across units (See Table 2). All tests were paper-and-pencil instruments. Cognitive achievement was also measured by Lesson Evaluation Activities. These activities varied with each unit, but included discussions, role plays, independent projects, and paper-and-pencil activities.

Attitudinal Assessments

Student affect for each of the programs was measured through classroom observations and interviews with each teacher. Data was collected on motivational appeal and quality/format of the materials, clarity of the Teacher's Guide, ease of activity/implementation, overall student response (effectiveness), and the relationship of the activities to stated program goals.

A Teacher Attitude Questionnaire assessed teacher attitude toward the hard sell and soft sell approaches. The Quesionnaire was completed by teachers using both programs.

Results

Cognitive Test Performance

The pre- and posttest scores for students using the CPS are given in Table 1.[2] The pretest consisted of 24 items; 12 of these were relevant to the four lessons tested. The range of scores for the 26 pilot test students on the total pretest was five to 13; the mean score was 10. The range of scores for the 12 items relating to the four pilot test lessons was 1 to 7. The mean was 4.6. The total possible score for the four lesson quizzes was 22. The range of scores on these quizzes was 1 to 19. The mean score was 10.9. There is no posttest data for three students and only nine of the 26 pilot test students took all four lesson quizzes. Nineteen of 23 students correctly answered a higher proportion of posttest items than pretest items.

A summary of information regarding the pilot test of the CEP is given in Table 2. The results of the pre- and posttest for each of the 11 units indicate that students made small cognitive gains. Five of the eight sets of data for which the standard deviation was computed indicate a slight drop in the variance. The decrease in variance suggests that although individual student performance was not remarkably altered, group performance was changed.

Student Affect

Observations and teachers' comments indicate positive student reactions to these career education materials. Teachers noted that students became actively involved in the activities and enjoyed completing the workbook exercises. Some materials relied too much on reading ability and memorization of vocabulary.

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[2]Complete evaluation reports for the first component of the CPS and for the CPS units are available. Interested persons should write: DISSEMINATION: Division of Research and Evaluation, Model Secondary School for the Deaf, Gallaudet College, Kendall Green, Washington, D.C. 20002.

TABLE 1

Pre- and Posttest Scores for CPS Groups

	PRETEST[a] (K = 12)	POSTTEST (K = 22)
Class 1 (n = 7)	M = 5	M = 12
Class 2 (n = 5)	M = 4.6	M = 12.5
Class 3 (n = 7)	M = 4.6	M = 10.5
Class 4 (n = 7)	M = 4.3	M = 10.7
TOTAL (n = 26)	M = 4.6	M = 11.4

[a]includes only those 12 items relating to the four pilot test lessons

TABLE 2

Pre- and Posttest Means and Standard Deviations for CEP Groups

PACKAGE	TEST ITEMS	RESULTS	
		PRETEST	POSTTEST
Loans and Credits	29	M = 9.2 SD = 2.5	M = 11.7 SD = 2.8
Using Natural Resources	47	M = 27.1 SD = 7.1	M = 37.0 SD = 4.5
Food and You	26	M = 15 SD = 4.7	M = 21 SD = 7.8
Exploring Grooming and Occupations	34	M = 12.5 SD = 7.6	M = 16 SD = 7.1
Introduction to Play Production	40	M = 24[a] SD = NA	M = 30[a] SD = NA
Learning About Occupations	37	M = 22[a] SD = NA	M = 25.5[a] SD = NA
Technology Today	42	M = 20.7 SD = 5.0	M = 26.4 SD = 4.1
Length and Area	28	M = 16 SD = 3.1	M = 22.7 SD = 1.8
Social Interaction	39	M = 19.4 SD = 6.2	M = 20.3 SD = 6.7
Self-Understanding	35	M = 25 SD = 4.2	M = 30.3 SD = 2.2
Getting a Job	37	M = 15.3 SD = 4.2	M = 24.5 SD = 7.5

[a]too few students to compute standard deviation

Teacher Attitudes and Preferences

Twelve teachers completed the Teacher Attitude Questionnaire. Seven of these teachers had used materials designed for separate and formal career education courses; five had used materials which infused career education into a traditional content area.

Responses indicate that teachers preferred to teach career education in a separate course. They felt that a separate course was more beneficial to students because it allows students to make more comparisons among job clusters and occupations. None of the teachers felt that the materials they had used had interferred with regular coursework but, they viewed the materials as emphasizing learning about work rather than traditional classroom subjects.

Conclusions

Pre- and posttest results across programs show a slight increase in the mean posttest scores. Neither program tested resulted in an educationally signficant student gain in career knowledge or in the traditional content area.

Teachers in the survey preferred teaching hard sell programs and believed that students benefit more from those programs.

Discussion

Although most theorists feel that a soft sell approach will better accomplish the objectives of career education than a hard sell approach, the results of this study suggest that a soft sell approach may work only if teachers accept the idea and have the materials necessary to conduct soft sell programs. Neither approach resulted in significant student cognitive gains yet, teachers in this investigation preferred the hard sell implementation strategy and believed students benefit more from hard sell programs.

Given these results, the easier approach for implementation may be to establish formal, separate career education courses. However, both types of programs have stengths and weaknesses. A compromise solution incorporating both the hard and soft sell approaches to career education offers yet another alternative. The approaches can complement one another by exposing students to the necessary career education concepts and vocabulary and to jobs and job opportunities related to specific content areas. Further research into these approaches and into ways the approaches may be combined to support and enhance one another is needed.

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